

## Introduction



This book traces the emergence of modern Egyptian identity from the last third of the nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Egypt's incorporation into the Western-centered global network of production and consumption spawned a new urban intelligentsia comprising teachers, lawyers, engineers, clerks, accountants, and journalists. This increasingly self-conscious social formation reconfigured religiously informed notions of the self and of the social order through its adaptations of modern ideas of individual moral autonomy and transcendent notions of universal citizenship. The present work describes the ways in which this intelligentsia carved what might be termed Egyptian-ness out of this raw material into a cultural, social, and political project, largely through its representations of Egypt's peasant majority.

The new forms of public discussion so essential to this process were intimately tied to the flourishing Islamic modernist movement of the nineteenth century. This book explicates these links and illustrates the importance of Islamic modernism in the elaboration of political, social, and cultural questions during this period. In so doing, these chapters call into question the notion, common in both scholarship and popular writing on the modern Middle East and the Muslim world in general, that there existed a set of secular aptitudes and areas of competency in the nineteenth century that were somehow separate from religious ones. Instead, by tying the burgeoning Islamic modernist movement to the process of identity formation and its attendant political questions, this book shows how religion became an integral part of modern Egyptian political, social, and cultural life.

The present account recalls a uniquely vibrant and creative period of cultural exploration and innovation in Egypt. From the last third of the

nineteenth century until after World War I, self-assurance was the most salient characteristic of the cultural landscape in Egypt, and indeed in much of the eastern Arab world. During this period the challenges posed by creeping colonial domination, poverty, and social upheaval did not diminish a brimming optimism about the future. This was a time when Muslim clerics as well as Christian and Jewish professionals, literati, and journalists sat together or debated in print such issues as the merits of constitutional rule, the essential qualities of the civilized home, and the importance of educating girls.

Not only in Cairo and Alexandria, but also in such dusty provincial towns as al-Mansura, Zaqaq, and Tanta, in literary and political salons, clubs, welfare societies, and learned associations, the efforts of the educated classes were instrumental in producing a modern political sensibility that remains the basis of Egyptian identity. A central component of this story is the important role played by the technologies of the nascent public sphere. Newspapers, journals, and new spaces and forms of sociability provided relatively large numbers of people with immediate access to new ideas for the first time.

This book places these cultural and intellectual changes in historical context by showing how they were embedded in the emergent social terrain of turn-of-the-century Egypt. I maintain that the construction of modern Egyptian identity was a political and social project. The ideal of Egyptian-ness embodied in the figure of the civilized, urban, and literate sophisticate was not a mood, a trope, an image, or an intellectual development; rather it was a claim to political authority on the part of a rising social formation. Literate urbanites were attempting to position themselves as the group most able to lead the social body to autonomy and prosperity.

Until 1914 Egypt continued to be, as it had been since 1516, a province of the Ottoman Empire. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, Egypt became increasingly autonomous. This move toward relative independence had not been a smooth transition. Indeed, the preceding half-century had been as tumultuous as any that Egypt had experienced in its long history. Expanded cotton cultivation enabled the well placed to accumulate unimaginable riches. This new wealth fueled the ambitions of Egypt's young ruler, the Khedive Isma'il, who dreamed of making Egypt a "European" state through such elaborate development schemes as the building of the Suez Canal. All of these plans came crashing down, however, in the wake of economic collapse, crushing recession, and bankruptcy. Isma'il's European creditors deposed him in 1879. Scarcely three years later British troops occupied the entire country to quell a rebellion undertaken by native Egyptian junior army officers against their Turco-Circassian superiors.

With the cultural, political, and legal ramifications of the collapse of Isma'il's grand schemes and the foreign occupation that followed in its wake, Egyptians were beginning to discuss, debate, and write about what made them Egyptians. These reflections occurred within circles made up of the new urban literate classes that sought avenues for political expression and access to political power in Egypt's evolving social geography. They endeavored to create an illusion of societal consensus and unity around their own increasingly coherent corporate interests and political aspirations. Essential to this collective process of self-imagining was their understanding of Egypt as a site of economic production.

These journalists, professionals, and Muslim clerics articulated a vision of Egypt's future while positioning themselves socially and politically in Egypt's present through representations of "the peasant." In lavishing attention on the peasantry, the educated urbanites generated a new understanding of the countryside and its inhabitants. Through new forms of ethnography, agricultural critique, and social commentary they depicted themselves as standing between the oppressed, submissive, backward, and ignorant peasants and the "tyrannical" and "despotic" Ottoman ruling elites. Representations of the peasants were an essential element in their constitution of themselves as ideal moral and political subjects and the guardians of Egypt's honor.

This emergence of an elite defined by education or professional status was not a seamless linear process. For example, in the first years of the twentieth century one prominent journal whose masthead described it as a "reform and politics" review portrayed the peasants as "uncivilized" and "backward," while the same journal featured an Egyptian critic of the British occupation praising the peasants' simple and unpretentious manners. In the same issue another political activist promoted rural folk as a good example for all Egyptians to follow because of their work ethic and piety. In yet another article an agricultural engineer bemoaned the inadequacy of peasant farming methods that putatively dated to the time of the pharaohs. It seems that the peasants were simultaneously dirty, clean, hardworking, feckless, honorable, gullible, prudent, reckless, strong, and submissive; they were at once good Muslims and so superstitious as to be ignorant of the most basic principles of Islam.

These inconsistent representations reflected the shifting currents comprising the process of identity formation. In the Egypt of the 1870s enactments of collective identity coalesced around "urban" and "rural" registers. Town and country seemed to belong to different worlds. For the so-called civilized urbanite, the denizens of the village were superstitious, gullible, and only nominally Muslims. By the 1890s, however, new representations of "civilized peasants" began to make their way into print. The

advent of the figure of the “thoughtful peasant” whose political consciousness overlapped that of the urban intelligentsia coincided with the crystallization of a new kind of societal vision. Urban literate groups increasingly understood “Egypt” to imply an indivisible economic and political entity. This development marked a shift in the logic by which Egypt could be defined along a physical boundary between city and country. That logic no longer held. Then, over the course of the first decade of the twentieth century, the literate culture increasingly placed peasant and city dweller alike into the same sociopolitical and indeed moral category, namely “Egyptian.” This development was the first instance of something recognizable as modern Egyptian nationalism.

### I.

Over the course of the nearly five decades treated in this book, literate Egyptians shaped their identities in a number of different ways; however, they most often articulated them in the new spaces of urban sociability and through the new media technologies of the public sphere. Therefore, the literate products and the public activities chronicled in these pages were an important arena, although certainly not the only one, within which this complex historical process unfolded.

Through the 1880s activist intellectuals in the public sphere began to conceive of Egypt as a community defined to a large extent by its capacity to produce agricultural commodities. These same intellectuals were also concerned with the increasingly powerful role of foreigners in Egyptian society and government. These two concerns merged into a consensus among intellectuals that they could no longer ignore the abject material and spiritual poverty of the peasantry if they wanted Egypt to prosper economically and throw off the yoke of foreign domination. Specifically, the peasants would have to develop the proper moral and social vision to appreciate the benefits that would accrue for all Egyptians if they were to adopt more productive methods of cultivation. Accordingly, it became the conventional wisdom among the intellectuals that improving the capacities of Egyptian agriculture could be accomplished only within a larger project of moral and social regeneration of peasants.

The impulse to reform the peasants and to remake their life in order to improve agricultural production became incorporated into the processes of nation building and eventually state building in Egypt. It is helpful to think of this reform movement as an episode in the emergence of Egyptian political modernity. In defining political modernity as “the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise,” the histo-

rian Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us that such modernity is impossible to conceptualize without thinking about “citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice [and] scientific rationality.”<sup>1</sup> Put another way, the unfolding of this historical phenomenon entailed the fashioning of new relationships between individual and society, between individual and state, and between state and society.

*The Power of Representation* narrates these changes in Egyptian society through an examination of the literate intelligentsia’s representations of the peasants. These pages outline the social, political, and economic developments of the period in light of evolving conceptions of community and self. It tells the story of Egypt’s nascent middle classes—a protobourgeoisie made up of teachers, engineers, doctors, journalists, and lawyers—crafting a new kind of social, political, and moral outlook that neatly complemented their own political aspirations. Through their writing, their civic, learned, and charitable associations, and their political activism the middle classes put forward a gendered, classed, and “civilized” subject—one that largely resembled their own self-conception—as the primary agent in Egypt’s social and political life. These chapters retell the history of the constitution and consolidation of this subject, the Civilized Egyptian, and how he came to represent Egyptian modernity.

It is important to point out at the outset that the inauguration of this national political subject in Egypt was the product of social struggle. In order to show the workings of this struggle, these pages trace the contours of the provisional structures of Egyptian social relations at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The book then proceeds to illustrate the ways in which the emergent middle classes created the illusion of consensus and unity around their corporate interest and political vision through representations of other marginal groups—specifically the peasants. These middle classes eventually cast the peasant as the timeless repository of Egyptian-ness and then linked that repository to their own political and social aspirations. In short, the representations of peasants were essential in legitimating and lending authority to the social ambitions and the political position of what became the nationalist elite.

The urban intelligentsia’s representation of peasants and other nonelites in their efforts to secure their own predominant place in emergent notions of community is hardly unique to Egypt. Partha Chatterjee’s work on India shows how the urban intelligentsia established a dominant position for themselves in the emergent social landscape of the nation through their power to represent possible rivals to their dominance. The process of

representation was designed to restrict the idea of the nation to the vision crafted by the protonationalist middle classes and thereby to secure their place as the dominant social group.<sup>2</sup> Representation in this formulation is a disciplinary act “which encodes a dominant point-of-view and a strategic relationship to social and political power.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, by examining the ways in which the literate intelligentsia constructed and deployed myths of unitary identity, we can gain critical insight into the development of Egyptian political modernity. Indeed, Samah Selim, an authority on the place of the village in Egyptian fiction, argues that the discursive project of “nation” to “create consensus and the myth of unified identity through suppression or ‘sanitization’ of dissonant cultures and voices—women, minorities, social outcasts, and the poor” is “primarily enacted through the process of representation.”

Social groups represent power in ways particular to their discrete circumstances. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, increasing numbers of Egyptians worked in new professional and technical fields, in state bureaucracies, and in the growing commercial and educational sectors. This inchoate assemblage of literate urbanites expressed their political and social views through their production of the “peasant question.” Peasants became central to their representations of power, first because the peasants comprised the great bulk of the population, and second because they were closely associated with the physical territory of Egypt.

Although peasants had been objects of mocking curiosity in the 1870s, portrayals of them evolved in a different direction during the 1880s and 1890s. Journalists, engineers, educators, and social reformers writing in newspapers and elsewhere depicted the *fallahin* as a timeless and undifferentiated mass. The descriptions of the literati presented rural people as a stagnant and unchanging feature of the landscape. Toward the close of the nineteenth century, however, “new knowledge” about the peasants led those writing in the press and in new genres of popular literature to recast the *fallahin* as a repository of collective authenticity, in a manner familiar to students of nationalism elsewhere. Then, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Egyptian protonationalists reinterpreted what had been formerly called the “stagnation” of the peasant as “permanence.” They then combined this reinterpretation with new kinds of romantic perceptions of peasants and peasant culture. Such innovative literary forms as the village novel did much to consolidate the romanticized view of the peasant. Novelistic representations of peasants produced a literary icon inextricably bound up with the anti-British nationalist project.<sup>4</sup> This new aesthetic element attached to representations of the *fallahin* set the revised versions apart from the older images of peasants.

Neither the consolidation of a self-conscious urban intelligentsia nor the newfound representational importance of the *fallah* can be understood in isolation from the transformations brought by capitalism and colonialism. The discursive products of these transformations were the loci in which Egyptians crafted new conceptions of self and community. There is a great number of works that address various aspects of the material, cultural, and intellectual effects of this transformation. Indeed, these works examine a broad range of issues, from land tenure and Egypt's position in the evolving system of global economic production and consumption to the administrative and police apparatus established under British occupation, the introduction of new legal regimes, and the development of the press and print capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

As useful as these works are in explaining Egypt's economic, social, and intellectual transformations, however, few have aimed exclusively at explaining the ways in which fundamental change was translated into the everyday practice of Egyptian cultural production through the nascent public sphere.<sup>6</sup> I use representations of peasants in my work as a key index of a changing sociocultural order.

Accounts of peasant life of the 1870s and early 1880s differed very little from those engrained in the popular imagination through poetry, songs, and traditional forms of entertainment. These accounts depicted the rural population as backward, superstitious, and unchanging.<sup>7</sup> Newspapers and popular literature of the time often commented on the fact that the peasants' lives and their methods of cultivation, their implements, habits, and routines had not changed since the beginning of time. For the producers and consumers of the new forms of literature, peasant life was utterly static, completely lacking in dynamism. These descriptions of the peasantry's unchanging nature created an impression that the peasant population was an inert part of the rural scenery. The fallahin became just another feature of Egypt's natural environment; they were described as a "natural" force, seemingly isolated and insulated from the modern (*mutamaddun*) world.

In the 1890s, however, the qualities of permanence and immovability were infused with civilizational critiques of Muslims and the "East" that circulated widely at the time. The Islamic reform movement criticized Muslims and Muslim society for deviating from what its supporters described as the True Path of Islam. Muslims, so claimed the reformers, had allowed superstition and syncretism to corrupt their practice of Islam, resulting in a stagnant and backward society. Echoing but redirecting the critiques offered by Islamic reformers, Egyptian social reformers, agriculture officials, and members of voluntary associations and learned societies pointed to the depraved state of the peasants as an embodiment of

this crisis and the explanation of Egypt's decline [*inhibitat*]. This critique signaled an important change in thinking about peasants in Egypt. While the fallahin continued to be represented as inert objects, for the first time they were also seen as an indispensable dimension of society—they could not be ignored. The peasants thus required reformation and revitalization in order for Egypt to become civilized.

Literary representations of peasants continued to evolve well into the twentieth century. Although popular writing often continued to mock the rural population for its simple and uncouth manners, the qualities of permanency and timelessness found in representations of the peasant began to take on new meanings in the confrontation with British occupation. These qualities became positive markers of the collective identity of Egyptians. Egyptians, peasants and urbanites alike, were rooted in the Nile Valley through their age-old connection to the land and by their shared customs and culture. Thus the peasants acquired unprecedented value in deliberations about Egyptian identity and in the emergence of what I refer to as Egyptian-ness. If one considers the way in which peasants had been identified previously, one cannot help noticing the irony in the fact that truth claims related to social, political, economic, and agricultural questions acquired an increasing measure of authority when attached in some way to the permanence and timelessness now symbolized by the peasant.

Within this shifting terrain fallah and middle-class urbanite (*'afandi/efendi*) were depicted as constituting a single people by the first decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, for the first time the entire range of views about the peasantry, from mocking to celebrating to romanticizing to criticizing, were now harnessed to reinforce the sense that peasant and *'afandi* shared the same collective identity—both were Egyptians.

We can mark this change in the way the reformers placed *'afandi* and fallah in the same moral universe. They were now convinced that the peasants, like their literate *'afandi* coreligionists, would have to cultivate a modern (*mutamaddun*) Muslim disposition. After the turn of the century, the peasants were accused of committing the same kinds of transgressions for which religious reformers had previously condemned the urban middle classes. But the peasants also presented a particular kind of problem. Because they so stubbornly resisted change, they stood in the way of Egypt's advance and presented a formidable obstacle to achieving a civilized social, political, and collective moral vision. Accordingly, the fallah must learn to overcome his impiety and behavioral indiscretions in order to become an upstanding and respected member of the community; in other words, the new peasants, like the *'afandis* of old, must be reformed.

All signs of differences among the fallahin were erased by this discourse of moral reform. This discourse abstracted the socioeconomic



component of peasant existence from consideration; thus peasants could be dolts or they could represent a reservoir of authenticity, but they could not make independent political claims—especially if those claims were based on their status as subalterns marginalized by an emerging plantation economy or by the political maneuvering of the urban *'afandiya* (*cfendiya*).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, nationalist discourses after 1900 silenced the now romanticized and folklorized peasants by depicting them as the embodiment of the nation. Their inclusion within the concept of the “Egyptian people” did not provide equality, for the discourses of reform and nation—which emphasized the peasants’ ignorance and backwardness even while valorizing their rootedness—masked their subordinate status. In effect, these discourses delegitimated political claims made on the basis of social and economic differences or on any question of status not authorized by emergent discourses of nationalist unity. Any such demand was deemed a threat to the “people” at a time of existential danger posed by the British occupation and the power of the West. The *'afandi* classes were the only ones authorized to speak for the people and as such they were the agent of a new kind of future. The peasants, on the other hand, were a voiceless and passive object of knowledge and reform. In this way, the representations of the fallahin that cast them as a part of an indissoluble Egyptian people inaugurated their subaltern status within the career of the modern nation-state.

## II.

Scholars of Egyptian history have recently come to recognize that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a seminal period in modern Egyptian cultural history. Historians and literary critics alike look to this period for clues about the way in which educated urbanized Egyptians came to speak for Egypt through their romantic and sometimes metaphorical reflections on the peasants and other groups.<sup>9</sup>

Journalists, reformers, and commentators of the new urban professional classes maneuvered for social and political positions within the modernizing colonial state. They depicted themselves as the only legitimate agents of change and the embodiment of civilization by producing technical, moral, and social information about the peasants to which only they had access. As the peasantry, the great bulk of the population, became a focus of concern and object of knowledge, the urban elites’ monopoly on the elaboration of the “peasant question” conferred upon them a dominant position within the social geography of the colonial (and indeed the postcolonial) state.

In sum, these pages examine the evolution of the middle classes brought into existence as a byproduct of the modernizing and colonial Egyptian state. An essential feature of their growing consciousness entailed elaborating notions of an Egyptian people in which fallah and 'afandi were integrated into a single whole. The middle classes established a hierarchy within this arrangement, however, through an emphasis on being "civilized." The urban professionals described themselves as the embodiment of civilization while portraying the peasantry as "uncivilized."

The peasants, however, were not the only obstacle to the ambitions of the incipient middle classes. Not only did the traditional elites still block their path, but the establishment and consolidation of British control further complicated their position. Over the course of time, this increasingly self-conscious group—which eventually evolved into the 'afandiya—railed against the "old regime" Ottoman elite for what they described as its feudal tendencies and its history of tyrannical and arbitrary rule. The reformers advocated rational and stable government and societal institutions, equality before the law, and representative political institutions. Ultimately, the 'afandiya depicted itself as standing between the "backward" and "ignorant" peasants and the old order of the traditional urban and landed elites. They wove the knowledge they generated about the peasants, their oppositional stance towards the old regime's ruling strata, and their own privileged position into the fabric of modern Egyptian political identity. As a result, the literate urbanite became the essential political subject of Egyptian history over the course of the twentieth century.

### III.

In the pages that follow, I make use of newspapers, journals, books, memoirs, and speeches of the time to illustrate the ways in which the figure of the peasant unified the discourses of decline, community renewal, and Islamic reform with the imperative of cultivating civilized moral dispositions. I discuss the ways in which the image of the fallah in news reports about rural violence and official corruption, moneylenders and irrigation, and agricultural pests and the courts was inflected by the discourses of religious reform and societal revitalization.

I do not claim that the texts on which I draw were influential in themselves. With the aim of demonstrating the depth of the social and cultural changes I identify, I read widely across various genres in order to take examples from a range of literature. Consequently, I am drawing on a wide variety of materials ranging from newspapers, novels, short stories, and humorous pamphlets to agriculture journals and manuals, memoirs, and

official documents. To be sure, these texts in and of themselves were not agents of change. Instead, I am here citing literature that best reflects the broad changes occurring in Egyptian society during this period. These texts, for example, illuminate the growing currency of notions of an Egyptian people and what I call Egyptian-ness within the literate strata. A reading of these texts affords us insight into how change was understood at the time. The texts also tell us much about the kinds of cultural resources that people of the time drew on to come to grips with the emergence of political modernity in Egypt.

These texts tacitly affirm that Western-centered global capitalism and the expansion of commodity production in Egypt produced the conditions that were shaping modern Egyptians. In the texts, one can see traces of the dominance of commodity export agriculture, the rise of proto-nationalist thought, the escalating volume of calls for “civilizing” according to an “Eastern” or more specifically “Egyptian” way,<sup>10</sup> and the impact of religious and social reform on public discourse. Thinking about Egyptian-ness in the early twentieth century milieu is unimaginable without taking those factors into consideration.

The first chapter describes the general historical background and identifies the major historical issues of the period that animate this text. In sketching the historical picture, this chapter begins to lay the groundwork for the rest of the chapters. It explains the cumulative effect of a variety of historical events from the nineteenth century that had such momentous consequences for Egypt over the course of the twentieth century. Developments such as the explosion of cotton production, the introduction of new legal and administrative practices, and the emergence of a nascent public sphere quite naturally led to an interest in rural affairs with a particular focus on the condition of the peasants.

Another important part of this historical tableau was the role played by the protagonists of the Islamic modernist movement. This chapter, and indeed the entire book, argues that in order for one to more fully comprehend historical developments in Egypt over the last century or more one must examine the pivotal role played by Islamic modernism in that history.

The second chapter focuses on the ways that the urban literati of the late 1870s and early 1880s thought and wrote about their own collective identity. The chapter shows that, from the very beginning, questions of identity were often articulated through writing about peasants. It highlights how literate Egyptians writing in the newspapers and other kinds of capitalist print media emphasized the importance of civilization in their deliberations about the importance of building new kinds of social, economic, and moral bonds and in the practice of politics and political organizing. That these discussions occurred in the burgeoning public sphere is a testament to the

importance of public-ness to the modern Egyptian identity formation. The chapter also underscores how the impetus to write about Egypt led intellectuals such as Yaqub Sannu' and 'Abdallah al-Nadim to conceive of Egypt less as a physical unit and more as a social entity.

Chapter 3 examines the social, political, and economic developments of the 1890s that were instrumental in the emergence of something clearly recognizable as Egyptian nationalism after the turn of the century. It also explicates the ramifications of the nationalist turn in the emergent Egyptian social imaginary. I proceed by looking at five peasant characters depicted in a variety of literature, ranging from popular humor pamphlets to journals of social and religious reform to daily newspapers.

I argue in this chapter that the ascendant Egyptian urban literate classes created a protobourgeois social and moral framework in this period, within which they crafted a political vision of their future through their vast intellectual production. Paradoxically, they put themselves forward as the primary agents of modern political thinking and acting through their representations of the peasants. I read their representations of themselves as the gendered, classed, and civilized 'afandi as both a political claim and an attempt to outmaneuver their potential rivals within Egyptian society.

In the fourth chapter I map out the changing social relations of the period in a more precise way through an examination of representations of peasants in agricultural literature and the ways in which these representations were themselves shaped by the discourses of Islamic modernism. The chapter shows how the political aspirations of the urban intelligentsia were increasingly articulated through the scientific idioms of agricultural knowledge and the moral values of cultural authenticity and political independence. At the center of this convergence was the peasant question. Due to its importance, the peasant question became the primary vehicle through which power relations were most starkly represented. This focus on the peasant question furthered the process described in Chapter 3 of installing the 'afandi class as the ideal political actor in the nationalist rendering of Egypt.

Chapter 5 brings the study forward to the 1919 rebellion. Over the course of the first two decades of the twentieth century the notion of Egypt as a people became further integrated into the consciousness of Egyptians. This integration is evidenced by the increasing salience of modern social categories and political concepts in representations of collective identity. That Egypt was a political project with a discrete biography and a moral conscience were notions that became increasingly embedded in Egyptian life due to the urban literati increasingly making use of new concepts of the individual, of society, and of collective history. Accordingly, it was

also in this period that the idea of Egyptians as a single people gained increased currency as the literati more completely assimilated into their writing on Egypt notions of social collectivity that had previously belonged to Islamic conceptions of the social. Therefore, in the prelude to the 1919 anti-British rebellion, this collective identity for the first time came to resemble modern Egyptian nationalism.

The concluding section of the book reiterates that perceptions of the world in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Egypt were not shaped by a contrast between secular and religious worldviews. For example, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish professionals, activists, theorists, and polemicists alike were inspired by and worked to accomplish the social, cultural, and political goals of Islamic reformers. Islamic reformers had aimed their appeals directly at a mass audience, and their arguments often drew on elements outside the purview of the institutions and norms of Islamic jurisprudence. As a result, Islamic reformism was the first modern sociopolitical philosophy and ideology of mass mobilization in Egypt. Its literate middle-class supporters regarded themselves neither as Islamists nor as secular political activists. Instead, they understood themselves as the natural representatives of a new form of community and the political elite of a new form of polity.

Nevertheless, these new contexts for the articulation of religious knowledge and the reconfiguration of aspects of Islamic social constructs did not signal their disappearance. Islamic notions of self and community continued to be reproduced in surprising and often contradictory ways in Egyptian thought and writing. New categories of social organization and new forms of identity did not simply erase what came before; rather, a complex and perhaps even dissonant admixture of customs and traditions of knowledge, practice, and belief blended together to produce a novel but nonetheless recognizable form of modernity.